

Army Benefits Center Opens for North Central Region

Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md. — Civilian employees throughout North Central Region recently took control of their federal benefits, as the region's Civilian Personnel Advisory Centers transferred many of their benefit services to the Army Benefits Center for Civilians on March 27.

The center, located at Fort Riley, Kan., now provides automated benefit services to more than 20,000 employees in the region's six-state area (Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, West Virginia and Pennsylvania), and military technicians with the U.S. Army Reserve Command located throughout the world.

The ABC-C uses state-of-the-art technology similar to automated systems used by banks, colleges and health insurance carriers, and offers two ways to access information and process transactions.

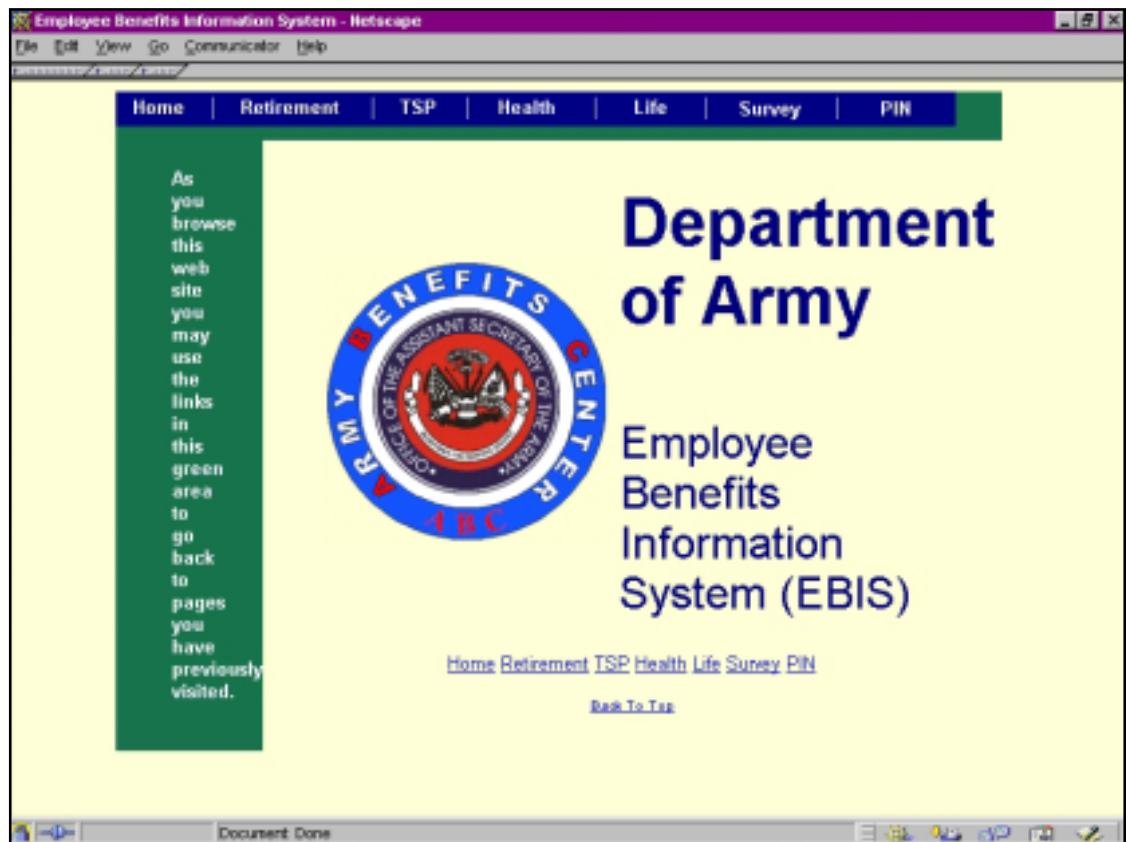
The Interactive Voice Response System allows customers to access the system through a touch-tone telephone and the Employee Benefit Information System, a customized Web application, allows customers to access the system through the Internet. Employees may use either system from any location to access personal and general information and process transactions regarding retirement, life insurance, health benefits, survivor benefits, and the Thrift Savings Plan. If assistance is necessary, IVRS users can transfer to a benefits counselor.

ABC-C will replace the old way of doing personnel business, where employ-

ees often made trips to the CPAC to make changes to their benefits. Most transactions will be processed overnight, and personnel can verify their transactions by revisiting the automated systems or

follows on the heels of the recent introduction of the Employee/Member Self-Service Program, but the two shouldn't be confused.

"It's also important for people to know



checking their Leave and Earnings Statement.

Although this is true in most circumstances, there will still be times when employees are required to go through their CPAC.

"In some cases personnel will still need to use CPAC on benefits issues such as beneficiary forms or transferring military time toward civil service retirement," said Vicki Kohl, personnel management specialist, Rock Island District CPAC.

The introduction of the ABC-C system

that this system deals with your benefits, not your taxes like E/MSS," said Kohl. "This is your life, your health, your TSP, and your retirement."

"It's going to be hard for employees to get used to not having a (CPAC) person to talk to," said Virginia DeMarce, personnel management specialist, Rock Island District CPAC. "It's going to be a change to start to trust a voice on the phone or to trust the computers."

In spite of the fact ABC-C is new, employees should have faith in the new

system.

"With the Army Benefits Center, benefits will be their whole job, so they should be experts, they'll know the answers to the hard questions we have to take the time to research or try to find out because it's only part of our jobs," said DeMarce. "They should have the most up-to-date information and all of the unusual things that happen, they'll be able to deal with those situations."

"Our goal is to give the civilian work force quality and timely customer service," said Kathy Cole, chief of the ABC-C. "The center streamlines the benefits and entitlements function, eliminates manual processes, and assists us in providing better and more convenient service to our customers."

The Web application has the same transaction capability as the IVRS, but the

EBIS is a fast, convenient and easy-to-use application with features not available through the IVRS, Cole added. A major advantage to using the Web application is the ability to navigate to the different programs, receive more detailed information, and process the same transactions as over the telephone.


Both systems are available seven days a week, 21 hours a day, and will be down from midnight to 3 a.m., Central time, for systems maintenance. Benefits counselors will be available Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. - 5 p.m., Central time.

As of March 27, personnel in North Central Region can access the Web application at <http://www.abc.army.mil> and the IVRS with a touch-tone telephone by calling the toll-free number **1-877-ARMY-CTR (1-877-276-9287)**. Hearing-impaired customers can call the TDD

number, **1-877-276-9833**.

Although a lot of information will be available through ABC-C, traditional means will still be used to help inform employees about health plans and TSP.

"As far as 'open season' we will still get brochures, we will still get the comparison booklets, and there will still be a health fair," said Kohl. "The only thing that will be different is they'll go online or phone to make any changes in their plans."

The center opened for Southwest Region employees on Jan. 18, 2000. As each Civilian Personnel Operations Center stands up, services will be expanded to civilian employees in that region. Personnel officials expect the ABC-C to be operational for the seven stateside CPOCs by December 2000. 

On Monday, May 1, 2000, the nation will again celebrate Law Day. President Eisenhower established Law Day by Presidential Proclamation in 1958. In 1961, the first of May was set aside by Joint Resolution of Congress as a "special day of celebration by the American people in appreciation of their liberties and the reaffirmation of their loyalty to the United States of America," and as an occasion for "rededication to the ideals of equality and justice under laws."

For more than thirty years many local lawyers' groups, bar associations, corporate and governmental legal offices, and military staff judge advocates have sponsored Law Day activities on May 1. Law Day has also served as an occasion for communities, citizens' groups, schools to further educate the public on the importance of the rule of law and the unique place of our Constitution and the Bill of Rights in human history. In the past few years, the American Bar Association, as the national professional association of American lawyers, has chosen a central theme for each year's Law Day activities.

This year's theme is "Democracy and Diversity." This is a particularly appropriate theme as our nation heads into a new millennium. Such a time is a natural point at which to both reflect back on past

struggles and contemplate future challenges. We are an exceedingly diverse nation and will only become more so in the years ahead. While the progress has not always been as smooth or as fast as we might like, the United States has shown the way for the rest of the world in expanding and protecting human rights, ensuring that all citizens receive the protection of law, and extending the blessings of liberty around the world. Our country's future will depend on our continuing to both recognize and use the strengths derived from our diversity and our remaining united in support of our democracy and the Constitution which safeguards it.

In celebration of Law Day, Office of Counsel, Rock Island District, will have an open house from 10 a.m. until 11:30 a.m. on Monday, May 1, 2000. The District's legal staff will be your hosts and will be happy to discuss Rock Island's legal services program and answer any questions you may have. There will also be plenty of refreshments available. We hope to see you all there.



For more information on Law Day 2000 visit the official website at:

<http://www.lawday.org>

